

Gardiner elk hunt falls victim to wolves

By Jay Kohn

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GARDINER - One of the consequences of "Living with Wolves" is the elimination of a special late season elk hunt near Gardiner that has been part of the Montana hunting scene for the past 35 years. The January hunt was first conducted in 1976, to help manage elk migrating out of Yellowstone National Park. At that time, the park's northern herd had reached as many as 12-thousand animals.

But once wolves were reintroduced to the park, the northern herd's numbers started declining. In 2005, game managers counted 9,545 elk. Three years later that figure had dropped to 3,912 animals, and by 2009 the herd's population was down to 3,511 elk. This year, FWP's aerial surveys of the northern herd outside the park's boundaries counted only 2,236 animals.

Last week, Montana's Fish and Game Commission voted to end the late season hunt citing elk numbers that had fallen below target levels due to predation mainly from wolves, but also from grizzly bears. The Montana Elk Plan established in 2004 called for a population of between 3-thousand to 5-thousand elk in the portion of the Northern elk herd that winters in Montana.

Zone	Unit	Year	Mon	Total	Cows	Bulls	BAB
Lolo	10	1989	Jan	11507	7692	1516	912
Lolo	10	1992	Jan	7745	5688	752	363
Lolo	10	1994	Jan	9729	7486	1107	814
Lolo	10	1998	Jan	5079	4469	318	268
Lolo	10	1999	Jan		Age Comp Survey		
Lolo	10	2002	Feb		Age Comp Survey		
Lolo	10	2003	Feb	2643	1832	419	344
Lolo	10	2004	Jan		Age Comp Survey		
Lolo	10	2005	Feb		Age Comp Survey		
Lolo	10	2006	Jan	3452	2276	504	252
Lolo	10	2010	Feb	1473	824	461	447

Zone	Unit	Year	Mon	Total	Cows	Bulls	BAB
Lolo	12	1985	Jan	4767	2847	966	652
Lolo	12	1986	Jan	4911	3059	1034	812
Lolo	12	1987	Jan	4612	2905	703	463
Lolo	12	1988	Jan	4547	2955	737	466
Lolo	12	1989	Jan	3763	2421	749	472
Lolo	12	1992	Jan	3452	2512	549	417
Lolo	12	1994	Jan	3315	2412	446	301
Lolo	12	1995	Jan	3832	2754	465	329
Lolo	12	1997	Feb	2667	2060	425	327
Lolo	12	1999	Jan		Age Comp Survey		
Lolo	12	2002	Feb	2048	1281	422	253
Lolo	12	2003	Jan		Age Comp Survey		
Lolo	12	2004	Jan		Age Comp Survey		
Lolo	12	2005	Feb		Age Comp Survey		
Lolo	12	2006	Jan	1658	978	475	344
Lolo	12	2010	Feb	705	534	133	124